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Letter dated 9 December 1997 from the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith a letter dated 9 December 1997, addressed to you by His Excellency Mr. Aytuğ Plümer, Representative of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.

I should be grateful if the text of the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 61, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Hüseyin E. Çelem
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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ANNEX

Letter dated 9 December 1997 from Mr. Aytuğ Plümer, addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to refer to the letter dated 24 November 1997 addressed to you by the Greek Cypriot representative at the United Nations, which was circulated as document A/52/700-S/1997/926, and to the statement made by the Greek Cypriot representative at the 55th plenary meeting of the General Assembly on 25 November 1997, under agenda item 27, entitled "Return or restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin". The statement and the letter in question contain unfounded allegations against the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus on the subject of preservation of cultural property.

Since these baseless allegations concerning the cultural heritage of Northern Cyprus have been dealt with in my previous letters addressed to you on this subject dated 25 August 1997, 29 August 1997 and 16 September 1997, and circulated as United Nations documents A/51/966-S/1997/666, A/51/970-S/1997/677 and A/52/366-S/1997/724, respectively, I will briefly reiterate the salient points contained in those letters in order to put the record straight on this matter.

The renewed allegations by the Greek Cypriot representative are part of the ongoing campaign of propaganda which seeks to project a distorted image of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. The Turkish Cypriot authorities take pride in their incessant efforts to protect the cultural heritage of Northern Cyprus, for which they have received praise from foreign experts and observers who have visited the island on occasions to study the situation. Necessary repairs and restoration of archaeological monuments have been carried out over the years and, wherever applicable, sites have been put into every day use in line with the universally accepted criteria and methods.

The authorities of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus are doing everything they can for the protection and preservation of the cultural heritage of Northern Cyprus, without any international assistance, in full cognizance that no country, including North or South Cyprus, is immune from the smuggling of objects of archaeological value from its territory. The Republic of Turkey, as in every other field, is extending all possible technical assistance and cooperation to the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus in its efforts towards protecting cultural property in the country. A protocol for cooperation in the field of culture was signed between Turkey and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus on 3 December 1997. The protocol, inter alia, provides for exchange of information and expertise in archaeology, ethnography, museum studies and arts, as well as the assignment of experts from Turkey to assist in archaeological works and studies, establishment of new museums, and restoration of historic buildings and monuments.

While the Government of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus ardently preserves all places of historical and religious value, the Greek Cypriot administration's poor record on this issue stands out in stark contrast. As a result of the armed Greek Cypriot onslaught against the Turkish Cypriot people

between 1963-1974, hundreds of Turkish Cypriots were killed, thousands rendered homeless and 103 mosques, shrines and other precious Ottoman and Islamic antiquities all around the island were deliberately destroyed. A list of the 103 mosques and Muslim shrines that had been the target of wilful destruction by Greek Cypriots is contained in my aforementioned letter dated 16 September 1997.

Today, the Greek Cypriot administration continues to display total contempt for the existing Turkish-Islamic heritage in South Cyprus. The historic Bayraktar Mosque which stands as a symbol of the centuries-old Turkish-Islamic heritage of the island has been the target of several bombing and arson attacks over the years. Only in August last year, the Omeriye Mosque, also located in the Greek Cypriot sector of Nicosia, was the target of an arson attack which damaged its historic structure, and another mosque in the town of Limassol was damaged by fire. In addition to such blatant acts of desecration and wilful destruction, the Ottoman Turkish architecture in South Cyprus in general is faced with the threat of disintegration due to the lack of any effort towards its preservation on the part of the Greek Cypriot authorities.

The double standard exhibited by the Greek Cypriot side in respect of the cultural heritage of the island is a clear sign of its lack of political will for a settlement based on the existence of two administrations and mutual respect for the ethnic and cultural identity and sovereignty of the two peoples.

I should be grateful if the text of the present letter could be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 61, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Aytuğ Plümer
Representative
Turkish Republic of
Northern Cyprus